

The
local town
celebrating
national
success

Business
LIFE

LOUTH



2010 has got off to a flying start in a rural market town, as business and community leaders start to pool their expertise in new ways to drive up its fortunes.

Words: Glynis Fox Photographs: Mick Fox and Eyerise Photography

Louth, which lies at the heart of the Lincolnshire Wolds, has a great catchment area and Town Centre Manager Mark Barnes, who took up the reins of this new East Lindsey District Council job late last year, believes it has huge potential to be recognised both locally and nationally as a successful destination market town.

The town, which has a particularly strong mix of independent businesses – but which also continues to attract a rising number of national players – is home to about 16,000 residents. In addition, it pulls in shoppers from villages within a wide radius of Louth and those who “drop in” on their way to and from Lincolnshire’s coastal resorts.

Mr Barnes said that, since taking-up his job, he has been concentrating on helping to form a Town Centre Partnership. And, after an initial meeting of representatives from business and community groups, at Kenwick Park, and other open meetings with key local players, a Partnership Board has now been formed.

“For the next twelve months, members will concentrate on drawing up a list of ten priority areas for action. A formal constitution will also be written and we will ultimately become a formal body. But we intend to make a difference. The Partnership will not simply be a talking shop,” said Mr Barnes.

“The partnership will be focusing heavily on

improving the vitality of businesses and community groups. We are starting to look at a “shop local” campaign, and encouraging people in and around to shop locally, rather than spending money driving elsewhere.

“Louth has lots of very active businesses and interest groups and the Partnership aims to consolidate their efforts. We will look at fundraising initiatives and it is hoped that some of our projects will be self-funding,” said Mr Barnes.

A Food Group has been formed to promote the town nationally as a Food Town, which will complement the aims of the Partnership and work closely with it. “We are lucky to have a massive amount of independent businesses in the town, especially niche food specialists who are hugely successful and they all have a good story to tell,” added Mr Barnes.

He said Louth’s superb range of traditional, homegrown enterprises, along with its branches of multi-national businesses, complemented by locally reared and grown produce, add up to a string of very good reasons why more people, such as those holidaying

at Skegness and Mablethorpe and people living well inland, should take a closer look at this Wolds gem.

As part of its determination to drive-up trade and encourage more tourists and other visitors to spend time in the town, the Partnership aims to provide a unified voice, speaking out on more challenging issues facing Louth.

Mr Barnes said these will include sharing its views on issues ranging from approaches from supermarkets wanting to move into the area, the future of the town’s cattle market and parking and traffic issues. So what else is worth noting about this popular market town, which sits alongside the River Lud and which, intriguingly, straddles the Greenwich Meridian line?

Well, if you enjoy markets, you should visit on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

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TRADE IN THE TOWN

Fascinatingly, Louth is a market town which is continuing to maintain a proud tradition of independent and family-run businesses.

And innovative moves, ongoing investment and the fact that Louth businesses are getting themselves noticed nationally, means that it stands a good chance of hanging onto its distinctive ambience, despite the relentless march of the multi-nationals.

Business partners Stephen Parris and Paul Adams run four stores in the town – trading as two separate businesses.

Mr Parris is kept on his toes at the helm of Dragonfly's gifts, homes and card shops in Eastgate, while Mr Adams runs The Cheese Shop, along the same street.

"Dragonfly has been in the town for twenty-five years and it has been based in a variety of locations, expanding along the way," said Mr Parris, who first started out in business in Lincoln in 1982.

"Louth is unspoilt and the configuration of many of its shops is thin and narrow, which excludes the 'big boys' from coming in as much as in other market towns. Louth has fought that encroachment," he said. "We have a lot of fish, meat, food and teashop businesses, which are privately-owned. We know many customers personally and they have come to trust us and keep returning."

Mr Adams said: "We have more than 100 British and European cheeses in our shop. We get our Italian cheese from one exclusive supplier and our French varieties from a specialist French supplier, which helps to ensure that quality is maintained.

"We also support Lincolnshire cheese makers. We stock varieties including Lincolnshire Poacher, Lincolnshire Red, Cote Hill Blue, Cote Hill Yellow and Billy's Best organic goat's cheese. Local cheeses are hugely popular and we are selling increasing amounts."

Mr Adams was one of the judges at the World Cheese Awards, held in Dublin in 2008, and last Summer The Cheese Shop featured in the Hairy Bikers' Food Tour of Britain series, screened by the BBC, which was both exciting and led to a superboost in sales, added Mr Adams.

The Cheese Shop enjoys sharing its expertise with shoppers, and Mr Adams and staff are able to talk about the age and provenance of various cheeses, and say whether they contain pasteurised or raw milk and vegetarian or natural rennet.

Sticking with the foodie theme, Meridian Meats is another business which has been enjoying increasing success. Run by Charles and Debbie Sutcliffe, and their son Jim, it includes a farm at Tetford, a shop in Eastgate (Louth) – which is now the home of the former farm shop – and an online service. Meridian specialises in selling its own-reared Longhorn beef and lamb, along with pork, chicken and other meats – mainly sourced from local farms.

Jim and his mother look after the shop, which also employs two full-timers and one part-timer. As we went to press, Meridian Meats was still basking in its success in being declared a regional winner of the traditional business category of the Countryside Alliance Awards, and staff had their fingers firmly crossed for success in the

Grand National final, being held in London on 3rd February.

Last year Jim Sutcliffe, whose formal training has helped make the family business what it is today, was one of five finalists in the BBC Young Butcher of the Year awards, having started out competing against a field of more than 450 hopefuls.

"I love the work I do, it is one of those jobs that you can really take a pride in doing because you are starting with the raw product and turning it into something which is saleable. It is extremely satisfying when customers come back and tell you how much they have enjoyed our meat," said Mr Sutcliffe.



PAUL ADAMS AT THE CHEESE SHOP



JIM SUTCLIFFE OF MERIDIAN MEATS



STEPHEN PARRIS OF DRAGONFLY

DEEP ROOTS

Eve & Ranshaw is a name that has been synonymous with Louth for the past 225 years. The roots of this popular department store go back to 1781 when Adam Eve – a man with a carpet factory and spinning mill – started the ball rolling. But its name changed over the decades as different people worked in partnership with Eve.

For the past thirty years, this retail business has been owned by David Sandwith, whose grandfather first traded in the town more than 100 years ago. But, while Eve & Ranshaw has been built on traditional values, Mr Sandwith is determined that it will always have a contemporary edge.

“We employ thirty-four people in the shop and we have just spent a lot of money upgrading the ground and first floors. I feel this reflects our confidence and our commitment to Louth. We may have been here a long time already, but we intend to be here for much longer,” said Mr Sandwith.

“We aim to have as broad appeal as possible. Although there is a surplus of people aged over-50 in East Lindsey, we have a range of departments and attract a wide age group of shoppers. Obviously, we get a bit of tourist trade from people visiting the coast, but generally we attract customers from within a thirty miles radius of Louth, including people from Lincoln and Grimsby.

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And, if you love fresh local produce the Farmers’ Markets take place on every fourth Wednesday and every second Friday, bringing extra colour and flavour to the area.

Louth, which has a mix of Georgian and later architecture, has an intimate feel about it – but that doesn’t mean everything is of small proportions!

Take the town’s largely twelfth century St James’ Church, which is well worth a visit and, even if you haven’t time to step inside, you can still marvel at its famous 295ft spire, which has been a feature of the town’s skyline since 1506. Louth also has its own museum.

And if you are looking to “namedrop”, the town has at least two famous sons – New World explorer Captain John Smith and the well-loved Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson. Both went to the King Edward VI Grammar School – although not at the same time!

While the town is easy to explore on foot, there is also a wealth of fantastic countryside on its doorstep. And you don’t even have to go far to find it. Take Hubbard’s Hills, just on the outskirts, which is a great spot for a leisurely walk or a family picnic.



CORNMARKET